

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO



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NEWS RELEASE

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Councilmember Atkins and Police Chief Lansdowne Pledge Support To Help Communities Reactivate Neighborhood Watch

SAN DIEGO -- At a joint news conference held Wednesday, September 3rd, at the North Park Community Service Center, Third District City Councilmember Toni Atkins and the city's new Chief of Police, William Lansdowne, announced their desire to help district residents reactivate the hugely successful Neighborhood Watch programs which helped reduce crime in District Three by more than 50 percent in the mid to late 1990s. The news conference was prompted by a recent increase in the number of violent crimes over the past month, including three murders, one in North Park and two in Mid-City.

"One of the toughest, least pleasant aspects of being an elected official is hearing that one of your constituents has been murdered," said Atkins, referring to the August 24th carjacking murder of a North Park apartment manager. "Police Chief Lansdowne and I want to let the public know that we are aware of this crime and are deeply concerned when any violent crime occurs in our neighborhoods."

On Thursday, August 21, at approximately 1am, a North Park resident and his friend were carjacked by two individuals as they were parking their vehicle at the rear of an apartment complex at 3939 Idaho Street. During the course of the carjacking, one victim, the manager of the apartment complex, was shot in the chest and later died as a result of the shooting. The other victim, the manager's friend who was staying with him at the complex, suffered serious injury, experiencing a gunshot wound to the back as he attempted to flee down the alley. The two suspects are still on the loose, and police are asking anyone with information about the shootings to contact them at 619/531-2000.

"For the better part of the last 10 years, we've seen crime, especially violent crime, greatly reduced throughout the city. In fact, San Diego is the safest large city in the United States," said Atkins. "We've been vigilant in holding off what many perceive as an imminent increase in crime rates nationwide. So any time it appears that crime, particularly violent crime, is on the rise, it gets my attention, as well as the attention of the police department."

Atkins and Lansdowne pledged to work with residents to reactivate Neighborhood Watch programs as one response to growing concerns around increased crime.

"Throughout the '90s, Neighborhood Watch programs sprang up in neighborhoods across the city, and in record numbers in Council District Three, with more than 200 active watches going strong at one point. Combined with Citizens Patrol and as part of the police department's overall plan of neighborhood policing, crime dropped steadily throughout the decade," said Atkins. "However, as crime rates dropped in the latter part of the 1990s, many of the Neighborhood Watch groups either disbanded or simply cut back on their activities. I think it's time to re-energize and reactivate our Neighborhood Watch groups in an effort to help the police department keep our crime rates at the low levels we've come to enjoy over the past 10 years."

Neighborhood Watch is a community-based program which encourages residents to keep watch over their neighbors' homes in an effort to cut down on the number of crimes in their neighborhood. It originally started in the 1960s as a way to decrease and deter the number of burglaries occurring throughout the country.

"Neighborhood Watch programs have proved themselves time and time again," said Chief of Police Lansdowne. "People who make the effort to alert police when there is suspicious activity make themselves, their neighbors and their communities safer. That improves the quality of life for everyone, and that's really the goal of all of us who work in local government. I'm looking forward to working with Councilmember Atkins in revitalizing Neighborhood Watch wherever it's needed in the Third District."

Atkins stated that she has asked her staff to begin working with neighborhood associations and organizations throughout the district to begin to identify where Neighborhood Watch groups previously existed, and take the appropriate steps to attempt to re-form and reactivate them.

"Throughout the years, Neighborhood Watch has grown from an 'extra eyes and ears' approach to crime prevention to a much more proactive, community-oriented endeavor," said Atkins.

"Neighborhood Watch groups are now incorporating activities that not only address crime prevention issues, but also restore pride and unity to a neighborhood. In fact, it's not uncommon to see Neighborhood Watch groups participating in neighborhood cleanups and other activities that affect the quality of life for community residents."

However, Atkins noted, it was the adoption of community policing by local law enforcement agencies that most greatly contributed to the resurgence in Watch groups over the years.

"Neighborhood Watch fits nicely within the framework of law enforcement/community partnerships, and Neighborhood Watch meetings can be a useful forum to discuss neighborhood problems and practice problem-solving techniques," Atkins said.

"I look forward to working with Chief Lansdowne, the local police officers, and community members to make Neighborhood Watch a vital component in our law enforcement strategy for the district."

To volunteer to start or be a member of a Neighborhood Watch program on your block, contact Councilmember Atkins' office at 619/236-6633.

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